

AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION MEETING
April 14, 2009
First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall

Minutes

Members present: Ruth Hazzard, Jaime Tidlund, Pat Wagner, Pauline Lannon, Linda Hess, Otto
Others present: Otto Stein, Conservation Commission; Diana Stein, Select Board Liaison

The meeting began with a brief introduction session and discussion on bringing farming to, and expanding local food production to the Amherst community.

Pat Wagner thought that having community gardens with some of the products going to the survival center and not bread alone would be a nice idea, as well as having their patrons help with some of the labor involved with the gardens. Also having a canning session to help with produce for the off season months.

Larry Winship from Hampshire College is interested in educating new students on farming and getting them involved with it.

Sarah Swartz spoke about hydroponics on her farm as well as www.Harvesttrader.com Sarah also thought that a map to farm stands so people know how to get there is a good idea.

Wm Levine thought that expanding market opportunities for farmers is important as well as teaching non-farmers how to grow.

Mary Wentworth from the Commons Group talked about becoming a sustainable community and mentioned Cinda Jones as being a possible land use resource for community gardens.

Rebecca Hall mentioned an open field in Echo-Hill that may be a nice area for a community garden. She also spoke briefly about bio-char and how it is beneficial to land. Rebecca thought it would be nice for the town to have edible shrubs around town instead of just regular flowers and shrubs.

Gary Courtemanche and Javeria Mir from the Amherst Board of Health introduced themselves and spoke later in the meeting.

Emma from Hampshire College was observing the meeting.

Bill Thompson thought that maps to the local farms and farm stands would be a great resource for this town.

Maryann Mitchell expressed her interest in becoming a living/learning lab so has the knowledge and desire just no help to carry it through.

Diana Stein thought there to be a real need for land for people who do not have land to grow on. Ms. Stein also thought that there was a need for a delivery service for local produce.

Casey Steinberg spoke about farmers markets and local restaurants being a great resource for local goods, but also that it was necessary and realistic to look towards local food stores and express to them a need to sell local produce, so it would be more easily available to people.

Michael Pill had the thought “what if trucks don’t deliver”, and that we need to have a plan on what is going to be done, and wants to see a community that cares about one another in case of problems.

Rob Crowner was observing the meeting.

Adam Dole spoke about bio-char and how it enhances the soil; he also spoke about beginning a wheat CSA

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Ben Grosscup is a member of the Northeast Organic farmers association and spoke about 13 organic farming workshops he is a part of as well as an advanced farming workshop being held at Simple Gifts Farm

Ed Bourgeois spoke about being happy with the CISA and Buy Local programs but is not happy with the communities' involvement. And he wants to see more work done in the local schools, as well as with local organizations like the boy scouts.

After this discussion a list of things that people would like to see the Agricultural Commission accomplish are as follows:

1. Get an inventory of town land and see what may be available to use for gardens
2. Speak with Cinda Jones about making some land available
3. Speak with Simple Gifts about the canning operation and other things like the root cellar.
4. Possibility of a "CSM" a mechanic for farmers
5. On Farm slaughter
6. Maybe have a clinic for small gardens at home, speak with Hadley Garden Center.
7. Look at older USDA farmer's bulletins.
8. This concluded the portion of the meeting on bringing local agriculture to Amherst.

Two members from the board of health spoke about the farmers market

Casey Steinberg talked about the proposed renovations to the Spring St. Parking lot, which is on the agenda for the next Select Board meeting. His concern was for the farmers market and the impact the construction may have on it, in addition to this he showed concern for the fact that this project got so far along in the works without many people knowing about it. It was suggested that the Agricultural Commission send something to Larry Shaffer so we can be included in on the public hearing for the design.

Nothing new is in the works for the proposed Massachusetts gas tax increase.

A discussion on the farmer's forum took place with a list of ideas brought from the meeting:

Compile a better list of farmers and a database to show who owns farms rents farms and supports farms.

Discussion of the farm festival took place:

A couple of meeting dates were picked to meet with Harpo, Pat is going to check on this with him and see what works. This meeting when decided will be posted as an Agricultural Commission meeting.

There was an update on the seeking of new members. Wm Levine has submitted his papers and is a top priority, four other names have shown an interest, going to check and see if it is a real interest or not.

A question was raised as to whether or not we want to keep the commission as a nine-member board or reduce it to seven.

As a commission we want to focus on where we are lacking in needs and what can we do to fix this.

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Topic for May agenda:

The cost of water/sewer what do farmers pay to get it and what does it cost to go out.

The minutes for the 3/10/09 were voted on and approved with a couple of minor changes.